

IMAGE OF THE WARRIOR

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Through analysis of the signs and symbols on the alternative insignia of Croatian military formations, the author checks upon the "image of the Croatian warrior" as presented to the public by the Croatian media, particularly at the very beginning of the war.

"The definition of one's own identity is a process of awareness, in which the other, parallel and simultaneous component is the definition of the partner in the social relationship (...) Cultural identity is the sense of community experienced and expressed in the language of symbols (...) In a situation of contact with the others, particularly when this contact assumes the nature of threat, the group's fundamental 'interest' lies in preserving and cultivating cultural identity, and making sure that other groups respect it" (Mach 1995:105).

In the war in Croatia, the "others" were the Serbs, mainly former neighbours *with whom coffee had been drunk until yesterday*, who, during 1990 and 1991, took up rifles and decked themselves out in Chetnik cockades. "They" were also those Serbs who crossed over from the eastern side of the Croatian border as members of what was now the single-national Yugoslav Army (the JNA), and of various voluntary formations, to help their *brothers* in the west. As presented by the Croatian mass media, the Serbian soldier was backward - thus uneducated, xenophobic and over-burdened with national mythologems - drunk, odourous and

gap-toothed, in a word, completely different from the Croatian soldier.¹ The stereotyped *soc-realist* image of members of the Yugoslav Army and the rural image of the Serbian volunteer in the Croatian media, as well as in professional and scholarly papers, was opposed, particularly at the very beginning of the war, by young men "with intelligent urban faces, appearance and deportment", with a black ribbon tied around the forehead and an earring in one ear. They wore training shoes, jeans and T-shirts printed with various statements in English, and hung rosary beads around their necks. They wore rocker or punk hairdos, Ray Ban sun-glasses, hats or berets and Indian scarves or scarves of the football clubs they supported, sang Dire Straits' *Brothers in Arms*, and scrawled on walls graffiti in English. They equipped themselves in NATO military surplus shops and through the classified ads in the *Večernji list*, a Croatian daily, and refused to wear the East German winter jackets they were offered or to use the Russian Kalashnikov automatic rifle (Horvat-Pintarić 1991:59, 61; Lalić & Bulat 1992:87–89).

Alternative symbols of the Croatian military formations

These and other similar descriptions of the Croatian soldier were written at the very beginning of the war, were ego-pleasing for the average Croatian, suitable for presentation in *third countries* - particularly in Europe and the United States of America - and were quite definitely authentic, at least in part.

However, a conversation I had with Captain Zlatko Ivković, manager of the Fund for Three-Dimensional Material of the Central Archives of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Croatia proved to me that things are never simply black or white, not even in wartime. He told me that the Kalashnikov - the *kalich* or the *Serbianka* - proved its worth during the war so that Croatian fighters respected its capabilities, and that *the boys* wore jeans and tennis shoes mainly because of the lack of military equipment. At the outset, some even had to wear JNA uniforms, Croatized by a symbol sewn on the sleeve (IEF ms. 1558). Thus the *image of the Croatian soldier* was given an added dimension, justified by the fact that the Croatian army had to be organised *on the run*.

Many of the soldiers took with them into war their peacetime rocker and punk haircuts, their peacetime jeans and earrings. Others, stimulated by the psychosis or psychology of war, denoted the new everyday life by piercing an ear, cutting their hair extremely short or letting it grow, and

¹ This is also a description of the photograph published in the American military journal *Soldier of Fortune* in 1991 (IEF video 415).

actually refusing to wear the uniforms which the authorities were offering them. The third group, similarly to those in the first, did not, on their whole, alter their image as *ordinary men*. Many of them had been brought to the battlefield by the intensification of the war, or by being called up into the reserves. The *Romantics* among the warriors called them *Domobran Jambreks*, a mocking variant of the home-guard or *Dad's Army*. Many of them had well-developed paunches and a grey hair or two, did not comprehend the significance of the black forehead ribbon - - "which was... such a symbol that some of the boys even lost their lives returning to retrieve it from the battlefield" - had no idea who the Ramones were, but hung rosary beads around their necks even without knowing "what it symbolised and how sacred it was" (*Globus*, February 7, 1992:2).

In this paper I shall try to test whether this *representation* of the Croatian soldier can be defended by analysis of the *Croatian military insignia*, the sole relevant material which it is possible to enumerate. More than 1300 *Croatian military insignia* are in question, collected and published in two monographs (*Croatian Military Insignia*, 1993 and 1995).

At the very commencement of the war, Croatian soldiers started sewing *insignia* on the right-hand sleeves of their uniforms, and these differed from the official insignia of the Croatian Army. Some of them were even older than the official ones. One of the first such insignia - - possibly even the very first - was designed in June, 1990 by Janko Jelčić, the curator of the Croatian History Museum for soldiers in the Podused Company, which was founded under conspiratorial conditions. It would seem that the continuance of the history of the phenomenon is easy to reconstruct. Those who had a sense for business manufactured and placed on the market a number of insignia, foreseeing sales not only to soldiers but also to other Croatian citizens who could buy them at the open-air markets and at street kiosks. The first units to sew these insignia on their *war clothes* provided an example for others...² Then the soldiers themselves participated in the process of manufacture of the insignia: they made sketches of what they wanted their insignia to look like, and ordered them from craftsmen.³ We learn the following about the insignia made by

² I owe what is probably a "construction of the history" of alternative insignia to Zlatko Ivković who identified the importance and interest of this phenomenon very early on, at the very beginnings of its existence, and immediately started collecting the individual insignia. The two monographs mentioned in the text are one of the results of his efforts.

³ New and increasingly numerous insignia accompanied the first information about alternative denotation of the units which were reaching the capital "far from the war". Friends and relatives communicated with their loved ones and friends who were

Mladen Kakša, the proprietor of a hat shop in Zagreb's *Martić* Street: "Firstly, friends came, and then the soldiers asked who had made the insignia, and it was not long before there were more soldiers coming to the small millinery shop in *Martić* Street than civilian customers. (...) It started with the warriors coming into the shop and unrolling unprofessionally drawn sketches. Mladen would talk to the visitors for hours. (...) The insignia he made had to be striking, understandable to everyone, and the warriors who sewed it on their upper sleeve had to feel that it was a sacred object which gave them strength, and made them invincible" (*Globus*, May 14, 1993:53–54).⁴

The editors of the two above-mentioned monographs concerning these insignia call them *Croatian military insignia*, but this term seems to me to be too broad and, at the same time, an imprecise denotation of the phenomenon; because of its character, I prefer to refer to this manifestation as alternative insignia of Croatian military formations.

Alternative insignia of Croatian military formations represent a phenomenon which lends itself to analysis from a number of viewpoints. Here, we shall be dealing primarily with the symbols and signs which appear on the insignia. As this concerns a really broad sample of material, we can allow ourselves quantitative analysis of the symbols and signs on the insignia, in addition to semantic analysis of the individual insignia. For a number of reasons, however, this analysis will result in approximate and rounded out figures. First of all, one must take into account the explanation of the editors of the *Croatian Military Insignia* that the published insignia do not present all the alternative insignia made between 1991 and 1995.⁵ On the other hand, in a number of places in the books the editors reproduced insignia which were identical in both form and content, and differed only in details. In addition, any *mathematical*

members of companies called *Wash Basin with a Hole, the Sponges, the Seals, the Tasmanian Devils, the Dalton [Brothers], the Black Pearls, Garfield, the Earth Worms, the Bats, Hell's ...* over radio and television broadcasts of the "greetings, requests and messages" type - such as *Sixth Column* and *Gardijada*.

⁴ From the same article in *Globus*, a weekly, we learn that "well-paid UNPROFOR troops" regard the insignia as "the most attractive souvenir they can take home from Croatia. They often enter the modest millinery shop in an expansive manner and offer huge amounts for collections of the insignia of Croatian Army companies made by Kakša. They are more than surprised when Kakša refuses to sell them these insignia. Some of them try to acquire them by offering foreign exchange. But, that doesn't help either. These insignia are neither sold nor given as presents. According to the agreement with the people who commissioned them, they can be acquired only by warriors" (*Globus*, May 14, 1993:54).

⁵ Zlatko Ivković, certainly best-informed to make this estimate, believes that the alternative insignia published in the books make up between 80 and 85 percent of the total number of insignia.

methodology of analysis of the symbols and signs will be questionable, faced, for example, with the image of the tiger; despite frequent variations, it is almost always the symbol of one and the same 1st Brigade of the Guards of the Republic of Croatia. Also in a number of cases one and the same author designed several different signs.⁶ Finally, another factor which should also be taken into account is the powerlessness of the researcher to *read* all of the examples in an appropriate way; and, no doubt, errors can arise in *counting* all the examples in such a broad sample of material.

The alternative insignia of the Croatian military formations are very often made in the shape of a shield, but there are also round, square and other shapes. They are woven or made in weaving techniques - by machine, or, as an exception, by hand, on fabric or felt, or by screen-printing on linen, twill, silk - often self-adhesive silk - man-made leather or paper. The composition of the insignia is usually symmetrical and as a rule consists of two or more signs or symbols, the official name or acronym of the official name of the company and/or its alternative name - - almost one third of the insignia - and only as an exception, the text of some motto or rallying-cry.⁷ On a small number of the insignia - only about five percent - the alternative name of the company, and the motto or rallying-cry are written in a language other than Croatian, most frequently English, but also Italian and Latin.⁸

The visual signs and symbols which appear on the alternative insignia are usually state symbols: the Croatian coat-of-arms and the flag. The Croatian coat-of-arms - its individual elements, or variations in the checker-board motif it features - appear in more than fifty percent of the insignia. The Croatian flag in its official form, or as a tricolour without the coat-of-arms, and the colours of the Croatian flag used in colouring the elements of the signs or insignia, or as peripheral, border elements of the signs are seen more rarely i.e. on some third of the signs, often together with the coat-of-arms motif on the same insignia. Symbols of the local and regional affiliation of the individual military companies appear on more

⁶ Zlatko Ivković had interesting experience after the publication of the first book; individuals who were members of the companies whose insignia were conceived by Mladen Kakša contacted Ivković, wishing to refute Kakša's authorship and "to fight for" the right for recognition of their own authorship of the insignia in question.

⁷ For example: *Call on us, simply call; Kova is ours; Everything is transitory, but not the Zagorac* [man from the Zagorje region]; *Croatia free again; Forward our Bombardiers, Jela's fitters are with you; More in appearance than in fact; Both of them, both of them;* etc.

⁸ For example: *Stop the War in Croatia; CRO Army Force; Guns & Rollers; Fire Fox; Mens sana in malvasia istriana; Sapientia in victoriam; Freedom Fighters for Croatia; Squadra mobile;* etc.

than twenty percent of the insignia, sometimes alongside symbols of the Croatian state. Something more than twenty percent of the insignia do not carry Croatian national symbols or symbols of local and regional affiliation. The interlace pattern motif also appears on some twenty percent of the insignia.⁹

Most frequently, the Croatian coat-of-arms on the insignia is shown in variants with and without the crown, with the standard number of checker-board squares with a red square leading off in the left upper corner. Many insignia designers also treated the pattern itself as a sufficiently clear indicator. So it is that some insignia show regular alternating placement of the red and white squares in the form of a tortoise's shell, in filling out the surface of the map of Croatia, and the map of Baranja, filling in the ground plan of the city of Karlovac, or as a heart motif (Illustration 1). In addition, the motif with regular, alternating placement of red and white squares makes up the background or part of the background of many alternative Croatian military insignia.

The second symbol of the Croatian state - the Croatian flag - is used less frequently in its official form on alternative Croatian military insignia, but more often in the insignia background, in the letters in the textual part of the insignia, some of the signs on the insignia, or the band which borders the insignia, painted red, white and blue.

In the way it is treated on the alternative insignia, the interlace pattern motif is a significant match to the Croatian flag and the Croatian coat-of-arms. It only rarely appears independently, as the focal element of the insignia (Illustration 2). Insignia designers chose rather to use the pattern to border the insignia or the central motif of the insignia, to flank the insignia or the insignia's motif, or to paint the pattern in the colours of the flag and add it to the insignia.

The criterion of frequency of appearance ranks second various motifs of weaponry and military equipment as signs and symbols on the alternative insignia: swords or sabres, rifles, various long-range weaponry, military, combatant and also transport vehicles, military aircraft and, less frequently, military sea-going craft, anchors, targets or mortars. Although everything mentioned here could be called weaponry or military equipment, semantic analysis would divide the ordinance mentioned into two basic groups. The sword, sabre and rifle would be in the first group, while the other weaponry and military equipment mentioned would be in

⁹ It would be possible to analyse the relation between individual motif groups and the insignia of companies from the various operations zones, but this would be very complex undertaking, particularly as the insignia presented in the book are not equally "densely" distributed over all the operations zones.

the second. Namely, although a rifle, unlike a sword or sabre, is still today part of a soldier's equipment, on alternative insignia of the Croatian Army, as a rule it has broader significance - together with the sword or sabre - - and belongs to the same semantic code as hammer or club motifs, followed by bombs, dynamite, explosions, fire, arrows or lightning, which are also found on the insignia. While cannon, multiple rocket launchers, and then tanks and other military vehicles, airplanes, maritime craft, anchors, binoculars, targets and mines usually depict the particular military combat arm to which the company belongs, rifles, swords, sabres, bombs, explosions, fire, lightning and arrows are used as visual equivalents of the army itself, in other words, its activities in war and warfare. There are numerous insignia which carry the motif of two crossed rifles, crossed swords and sabres, but also various other weapons. Very often the weapons are crossed with olive leaves (Illustration 3). The inspiration for these motifs should be sought in the crossed rifle motif on official Croatian Army insignia,¹⁰ on other insignia including foreign insignia, and possibly in heraldry where the crossed weapon motif is found very often (Illustration 4).¹¹

The motifs of fists, hands holding swords, or hands wearing armour and holding a sword, belong to the same semantic code, and also to common heraldic motifs. A similar denoting role is played by elements of uniform, usually the military cap or, in one example, the military boot, and the camouflage pattern, which is most usually used as an indicator of the basic figure or sign on the insignia. In character, they infer a somewhat more special meaning, and denote one specific, Croatian Army.

In addition to these motifs on the alternative insignia of the Croatian army, others also appear which formally and "administratively" can be called zoomorphic, phytomorphic, anthropomorphic and *artistic* motifs. The most commonly appearing motifs among them are birds: eagles, swans, falcons, hawks, crows, grouse, doves, sparrows, vultures, sparrow hawks, storks, house martins, herons, owls, partridges, cormorants, peacocks, green woodpeckers, and the motif of bird wings, or claws (Illustration 5). In this group, one should differentiate between the image of the eagle, falcon and hawk and that of other birds, because they express meaning compatible with the concept of the army. The other birds became motifs on the insignia for other, not always apparent, reasons. The image of the white dove clearly connotes the meaning of peace, and that of the

¹⁰ The crossed-rifles motif is also found on the official insignia of the Croatian Army, and it was made in 1991 and worn by soldiers on the left sleeve of their uniforms. Any commentary on the numerousness of that particular motif - and similar ones - on alternative insignia will have to take this factor into account.

¹¹ See, for example: Siebmacher, 1995.

owl, wisdom. Both these birds can be found, for example, as can the stork, on the crests of noble Croatian families, which it would seem were one source of inspiration for the insignia.¹² However, just how inappropriate any generalisation would be is demonstrated by the image of the owl on the insignia of one of the Karlovac companies: the same insignia bears the inscription *Twin Peaks*, after David Lynch's cult television serial in which the frames showing the owl had the role of accentuating a specific type of situation. Thus, in this case, the owl's image cannot be read as signifying what is generally meant by it; rather, our interpretation is conditioned by what it denoted in *Twin Peaks*, or by what the serial itself denoted (Illustration 6). That the image of a bird can also denote the local affiliation of a military company can be seen on the insignia of the company from the town of Jastrebarsko (the name of which means something like Hawk Town in Croatian).

The next group of motifs covers various types of fish - pike, barracuda, angler fish, shark - and other sea-dwelling creatures like the seal, dolphin, whale and sea-horse, crab, octopus, jelly-fish, followed by reptiles such as the snake, crocodile and lizard. As with the bird motif, here too, in the majority of cases, we can only assume the meaning connotation. While we can be fairly sure what all the meanings could be with the shark, snake or crocodile motifs, with the angler fish motif - its name in Croatian is far less innocuous, conjuring up something between ugly and monstrous - we would have to delve into linguistic and semantic analysis of the name of this fish, although the name in Croatian authentically reflects its appearance. With the crab image we are reminded of its claws and armour, with the octopus the deadly embrace of its eight tentacles, while in consideration of the other motifs mentioned we would venture more deeply into the realm of assumption (Illustration 7).

There are both domesticated and wild animals, and insects, native to Croatia, in the group of animals represented on the alternative insignia, as well as animals from exotic climes. I shall mention all of them: cockerels, hens, chickens, pigs, sheep, billy-goats, dogs, horses, cats, bulls, donkeys, wasps, bees, bumble bees, ants, termites, flies, cockroaches, otters, beavers, moles, squirrels, hamsters, badgers, skunks, mole crickets, worms, snails, tortoises, hedgehogs, hares, foxes, wolves, deer, bears, boars, spiders - and spiders' web - scorpions, bats, rats, coyotes, tigers, pumas, panthers, jaguars, lynx cats, leopards, cheetahs, lions, rhinoceroses, monkeys, penguins, giraffes, camels, zebras, kangaroos, chameleons and mountain goats. Some of the animals denote the fields of activities of the military companies. Thus the otters, beavers, moles and mole crickets are elements on the

¹² See, for example: Siebmacher, 1995.

insignia of the engineers, the hedgehogs denote the sappers from Slavonski Brod, the Nova Gradiška battalion for defence of the city, and the Čakovec engineering regiments, while the images of the rhinoceroses and the tortoises are found on the insignia of four of the tank companies (Illustrations 8 and 9). Here too, as in a number of previous examples, it is clear that a sum of the characteristics possessed by some of the animals and insects mentioned were *identified* by the soldiers as characteristics which they considered that they themselves possessed, while the images of others found a place on the insignia directly *from military life*, as a trace of some well-received joke or as a metonym for some certain event in the life of the company. This could be claimed, for example, in connection with the hare motif which is accompanied on one of the insignia by the inscription of the alternative name of the company: *Boys for brisk action*. Particularly indicative for this mode of interpretation are figures of wild cats - powerful, fast, agile and dangerous animals (Illustration 10). However, the fact that care taken in interpretation is never superfluous is shown by the figure of the lynx cat on the insignia of the Delnice company, where it denotes the local affiliation of the company: namely, lynx cats lived in the Gorski Kotar forests until the end of the last, and the beginning of this century.

Some of the phytographic motifs on the insignia also probably speak to us of the place of origin of the companies, at least in the regional sense: the edelweiss flower, for instance, is the insignia of the Velebit alpine company. But the oak leaf motif or the acorn is never found on the insignia of the military companies from Dalmatia, nor could one find a sheaf of wheat or ear of corn motif on their insignia. Nonetheless, one should bear in mind that the oak leaf and acorn motifs are otherwise common - not only in Croatia - in the insignia of military companies.

A separate group of motifs is made up of the figures of dragons, chimeras, sphinxes, sirens, phoenixes, the Pegasus, angels or avenging angels carrying swords, all of which are found in heraldic motifs. The Phoenix is a beautiful mythological bird from the Arabian deserts which was burnt on a funeral pyre, rose from its own ashes full of life and power and started a new cycle of life. In Christian iconography, it symbolises the resurrection of Christ, bearing similar symbolic weight to that of the Latin cross and rosary beads. Two *adult* angels armed with swords flank and support the Croatian coat-of-arms shown on the insignia of the Samobor company, just as the two *putta* carry the Croatian coat-of-arms on the *CroAngels* insignia. By their place in the insignia's composition, and also by their function in the description of its content - supporting, carrying - they belong to the group of heraldic elements which are called guardians of the coats-of-arms (Illustration 11).

Images of the devil, witches or warlocks on alternative insignia probably bear a dual semantic charge. And while we will read some of these images as visualisation of the claim that the members of the company are *real devils*, others will be nearer in meaning to the death's head symbol or *Death* mounted upon a horse with his scythe in his hand, figures which are to threaten the enemy from the insignia. However, the image of a witch riding a broom-stick with a sword in her hand, found on the insignia of the company from Ogulin, denotes the local affiliation of the company, embodying the legend which tells of witches holding their covens on Klek Mountain which overlooks Ogulin (Illustration 12).

Alternative insignia also denote images of Croatian historical personalities, in which case the name of that personality is, at the same time, the name of the company. In this group one finds the Radić brothers, Eugen Kvaternik, King Tomislav, King Domagoj, and we shall add the crown which the owner clearly denoted - in one of two examples - on the name of the company inscribed on the insignia: *King Zvonimir* (Illustration 13).

Most of the images of the saints which are found on alternative insignia of the military companies denote the local affiliation of the companies. Due to the fact that these are patron saints of the individual towns and/or saints after whom local churches are named, it is not unreasonable to think that the people commissioning the insignia also hoped that they would offer protection to the companies in question. These saints are: St Vlaho [Blaise] (Dubrovnik), St Rok (Drniš), St Mihovil (Šibenik), St Krševan [Chrysogono] Zadar, St Vid (Rijeka), St Martin (Pridraga) and St Juraj [George]. Saint George is the most highly represented saint depicted on the alternative insignia. A Roman military officer and martyr whose cult spread particularly widely during the time of the Crusades, when many Croatian cities placed themselves under his protection, he was one of the most popular saints during the Middle Ages. He was believed to protect people against infectious diseases like the plague, from peril at sea, and before the courts, he protected the soil, crops, greenery and livestock, horses, farmers and shepherds. He was the protector of all crafts connected with farming, and also the protector of crusaders, knights, and soldiers. It was in this latter function that he entered onto the alternative insignia of Croatian military companies where he is shown, as a rule, in his role best known in western iconography, as a horseman armed with a shield and a spear, slaying the Dragon (Illustration 14).

Although it is difficult to find a place for it among any of the other groups, the small *Viking* motif group is a very interesting one: the figure of the Viking, the Viking helmet and the Viking ship are found on the

insignia of companies from Osijek, Karlovac and Metković. The signals they emit indicate the semantic circle of armies and the waging of war.

One of the two *Viking* insignia from Metković shows the Viking, Hogar the Brave, the hero of the comic-book of the same name (Illustration 15). Just by this fact, the insignia belongs in the group which shows characters from cartoon films and comic-books, and stories and films for children: the Flying Bears, the Smurfs, Smile, the Blue Racer, Tom the Cat and Jerry the Mouse, Killer the Dog, Garfield, Casper, Snoopy, Charlie Brown, Bob Rock or Number One, the Gremlins, Native Americans (Sioux, Apache or just simply *Indians*), Captain Cook, Robin Hood, Baron Münchhausen, and a number of others, mainly *naughty* babies and Panda the Bear (Illustrations 16, 17, and 18).

The last group of motifs is made up of what we could call by the somewhat clumsy term in common use, *artistic images*. These are motifs such as the Latin cross, rosary beads, hearts, suns, moons and stars, the twelve European Union stars, tears and horseshoes. Some of them probably also have a apotropaic task. Also very rarely, in one or two - in four at the most - of the 1 360 analysed examples, the eye motif is used and/or the cat's eye motif, the symbol of the Olympic Games, the fishbone, horns, a brush, ladders, a book or the eye-glasses motif.¹³

Two fingers raised in the *V for Victory* sign, the raised middle finger motif, the Serbian coat-of-arms motif - contextually with a negative denominator - and the SS, and U for Ustashi symbols belong in the same motif group. The Serbian coat-of-arms denotes the military objectives of the *Devil's Troop*. It is presented on the insignia as if written out on a piece of paper speared by a trident wielded by a *likable little Devil* (Illustration 19). Two letter S-es in the shape of bent arrows were drawn one beside the other by the designer of the insignia of the Duga Resa company. The shape of the letters and the black background of the insignia, which carries no other signs and symbols, clearly indicates the model for the insignia taken from the notorious German SS units from the time of World War II (Illustration 20). On the other hand, the separation of the motif/symbol of the letter U, the insignia of the Ustashi Movement, requires particular explanation. Namely, it is important to point out that mention of each insignia example in which I identified the U sign could be criticised as a tendentious analysis of form, which I would find it hard to defend qualitatively. In a number of examples, namely, a one-coloured or red, white and blue narrow ribbon folded into the shape of the letter U was done in such a way that, because of the shape of the insignia, it could be

¹³ The logo of the Olympic Games denoted the Croatian Guards company whose members were all active sportsmen (my thanks to Tomislav Ivković for this information).

interpreted as being an ordinary border. Only in seven examples was it possible to interpret the letter with more certainty by the *tail ends* of this band, or - in one case - where the band was so wide that it could not possibly be described as a border (Illustration 21).¹⁴

Perhaps the relationship between elements of the dominant culture, elements which are common heraldic motifs or motifs of military insignia, elements which are geographically and nationally *neutral*, and elements of youth culture on alternative insignia is more interesting than the interpretation of particular signs and symbols. However, such a relationship cannot be expressed numerically. At first glance, it would be possible to establish the presence of a surprising large - but not prevailing - number of sub-cultural elements and/or elements of popular culture. Primarily, this group is made up of all the characters from cartoon films and comic-books, and stories and films for children which I have already mentioned. As a rule, they are combined with other signs and symbols.

The image of Casper the Friendly Ghost on the insignia of the *Ghosts of the Forest* peeks out above the Croatian coat-of-arms and flag, making the victory sign with his left hand (Illustration 22). The same character appears on the insignia of two other units. On their insignia, the *Little Flying Bears* have taken the image from the cartoon film of the same name, placing it on a red, white and blue background, bound in an interlace pattern band. The Sisak logistics base insignia carries the image of Jerry the Mouse comfortably stretched out on a stump, holding a walkie-talkie in his hand, his cap marked with the Croatian coat-of-arms, and, above him, the Croatian flag and coat-of-arms and the crest of the city of Sisak (Illustration 23). Killer the Dog is seen snarling on the insignia of the Nova Gradiška unit. The *Naughty Children* company wear insignia which show a small child sitting on his potty, sucking on his dummy. He holds a telephone receiver in his left hand, two fingers of his right hand are stretched out in the victory sign, while a piglet is sketched on his bib. The Croatian flag and coat-of-arms are seen above the child, and the insignia is bordered in the red, white and blue of the Croatian flag. Bob Rock, the likable bore and bungler from the *Alan Ford* comic-book winks out from the insignia of the *Freak-Outs*, wearing a camouflage cap with a Croatian coat-of-arms (Illustration 24). Charlie Brown, too, donned a camouflage uniform in Croatia. A rifle hung from his shoulder, and the background of the insignia showed a comic-book type explosion with the inscription *BUM* [Boom] (Illustration 25).

¹⁴These "tails", or ends, were a snake's head and tail-end in one case, the thickened ends of the curve of a horse-shoe in another, and I was not sure with one example if it represented horns emerging from the Croatian coat-of-arms, or the letter U.

Youth culture speaks out in these few examples primarily through the selection of the character which is the leading visual element in the insignia. The victory sign gesture made by Casper and the comic-book visualisation of the explosion additionally denoting Charlie Brown can be interpreted as visual youth jargon. However, the victory sign and the explosion enter into the semantic field of armies and the waging of war, and with the aid of the same code we can read the threat in Killer the Dog's snarl.

One also finds comic-book visual interpretation of insignia elements in cases in which one cannot recognise heroes from comic-books and cartoons in the figures on the insignia. The plasticity of the hand clasping the knife on the *Steelers'* insignia is achieved through contrast between strong black and white surfaces, such as are characteristic to comic-books (Illustration 26). The comic-book type figure of the hamster on the *Hamsters'* insignia is seen in its flatness, firm and clear outlines, but, primarily, in the large whites of its eyes and the round, black snout containing a white, round "lustre". The figure of the snail on the alternative insignia of the *Slimy Snails* differs from a realistic image of a snail by anthropomorphisation of the head: the round eyes and open mouth which give the snail's *face* a scamp's expression. In addition, the barrel of a cannon and a multiple rocket launcher are attached to the snail's back (Illustration 27). The goat's head on the Pula *Grandpas'* insignia is made human in comic-book fashion, with contrasting shadows and sketching in firm, clear lines. The goat, otherwise a symbol of the Istrian region and an element on the Istrian coat-of-arms, is additionally denoted here by an army helmet with a camouflage pattern (Illustration 28).

Meaning from the same semantic circle emanates from the insignia of the *Blues Brothers*, musicians of one of the Crikvenica brigades. The name of the soldier-musician group inscribed on the insignia simplifies interpretation of the simple reproduction of sun-glasses: such glasses were worn by the two actors who starred in the popular American film from which the group took its name. The semantic code to which this insignia belongs has no connection whatsoever with armies and war, apart from the doubtful link which could be established - on the basis of the concept, *brothers* - between this group and the name of Dire Straits' song *Brothers in Arms*, which was adopted by Croatian soldiers from the very beginning of the war to indicate their unity. So we will interpret the name of the *Blues Brothers* group and the sun-glasses on their alternative insignia on the basis of their music activities. The second example of alternative insignia on which the sun-glasses motif appears requires different reading of meaning. The insignia of the *Dudes* from Rijeka shows Ray Ban sun-glasses: a fashion detail which, prior to the war in Croatia, had been a type

of status symbol for youngsters from better-off families who followed modern trends, took another turn in the context of war - judging from recorded statements of soldiers and sociological studies - aiding in the creation of the image of the warrior, fearless, muscular and indestructible, just as Rambo was. The inscription on the insignia - also the name of the unit - takes us back to a pre-war context, although it is hard to rid oneself of the impression that the semantic coding of the insignia has an ironic element (Illustration 29).

Interpretation of the red roses on the insignia of the company from Kutina is determined by the inscription woven above it: *Rose of Croatia*, the syntagm which made popular - even cult - the song *For My Mother* by the *Prljavo kazalište* [Dirty Theatre] group's song, even prior to the 1990 multi-party elections in Croatia.

The use of the English language on the alternative insignia of Croatian military formations signals, as a rule, a popular or sub-cultural coding of the message. Such is the case with the insignia which shows no Croatian symbols, nor symbols of local or regional affiliation of the units, while its focal point is a fist with a raised central finger. So that there can be no mistake concerning the addressee of this message, *Fuck YU* is written above the fist, YU being the abbreviation for Yugoslavia (Illustration 30). The meaning of the message on the insignia of one of the *Rear Lines Platoons* from Nova Gradiška will have to be read off from the meaning potential of the concept in the Croatian language. Namely, the insignia shows only the back part of a female figure - cut off at the waist and at mid-thigh - dressed in shorts (Illustration 31). The part of the body depicted is colloquially called *the rear*, without any direct semantic code connection with armies and warfare. However, as this insignia denotes a group of men catapulted out of their everyday lives into military life, the insignia can also be read as a specific message from male, military sub-culture.

The same interpretation is applied to messages sent by motifs on drink bottles, empty cans with a camouflage pattern, four playing cards or a demijohn, a wicker-covered flagon or bottle (Illustration 32). From the *Bacchus* and *Pomace Flies* insignia, we learn that members of these units like to drink wine, and that they probably spend their rest time and recreation doing so.

Conclusion

Many similar examples could be described among the alternative insignia of the Croatian units. Those mentioned are only a chance selection, but they indicate with sufficient clarity all the complexity of interpretation.

The alternative insignia of the Croatian military companies cover a wide range between the extremes of denotation and connotation. Namely, some of the insignia are over-loaded with indicators and it often happens that a number of indicators refer to one and the same thing - particularly when denotation of the national affiliation of the unit is in question. Other insignia have a minimum number of indicators, while that which is indicated is not always connoted with equal clarity. In such cases, we more frequently see traces of witticisms or quips, and recognise elements from the circle of sub-culture or popular culture. It is also possible to claim, with a qualification taking into account the *imperfection* of the sample, that such insignia were mainly worn by members of the Rijeka Operative Zone companies and, somewhat more rarely, by members of the Zagreb Operative Zone units. The more serious demeanour of the other insignia can in no way be interpreted as being due to the lack of humour among the Slavonians, and soldiers from Lika and Podravina. It would be more fitting to think along the lines of the influence of proximity to active war zones, despite how relative this may be.

Alternative insignia speak to us of *alternative aspects* of the life of soldiers on the battlefields. Separated from their *normal* surroundings, these soldiers took their *peacetime identities* into war with them, and added to them their newly acquired identities as warriors. And while the former peacetime identity spoke out in harmony, based primarily on youth culture and an amalgamation of sub-culture and popular culture with the now more clamorous or just awakened national culture, the warrior identity found its expression in alternative insignia, in representation of weaponry and military equipment or classic military and heraldic elements of signs and combinations of signs.

The number of alternative insignia and, particularly, the obvious complexity of their interpretation could produce much more text that is the case with this article. However, it is almost impossible to write a conclusion which would unify all the alternative insignia, and to speak of anything other than their diversity. There can be no doubt that they authentically reflect the need that life on the battlefield be more than a mere battle with the enemy. At the same time, the insignia unite the members of the units and give them courage, and many of them are also a trace of *normal* peacetime life, a trace which is always close at hand. We also regard the alternative insignia as an indicator of the *culturological state* of Croatian military formations, but I shall borrow the words of Darko Glavan which he used in another, but similar context: they themselves *speak more directly* about many aspects of the war in Croatia *than numerous essays and studies* (Darko Glavan quoted by Horvat-Pintarić 1991:59). They will help us in describing the *image of the*

warrior who was sometimes Rambo, and sometimes *Jambrek the Domobran*, but most frequently an ordinary human being catapulted from peacetime into the everyday life of wartime.

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(Translated by Nina H. Antoljak)



Illustration 1: The unit from Osijek (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I, 305*)



Illustration 2: The unit from Zagreb (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I, 138*)



Illustration 3: The unit from Zagreb (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I, 91*)



Illustration 4: The unit from Osijek (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I, 68*)



Illustration 5: The unit from Rijeka (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 384)



Illustration 6: The unit from Karlovac (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje II*, 418)



Illustration 7: The unit from Rijeka (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 357)



Illustration 8: The unit from Sisak (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 104)



Illustration 9: The unit from Zagreb (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 130)



Illustration 10: The unit from Nova Gradiška (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 164)



Illustration 11: The unit from Split (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje II*, 578)



Illustration 12: The unit from Ogulin (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 344)



Illustration 13: The unit from Ogulin (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 346)



Illustration 14: The unit from Duga Resa (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 339)



Illustration 15: The unit from Metković (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje II*, 632)



Illustration 16: The unit from Karlovac (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 326)



Illustration 17: The unit from Crikvenica (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 493)

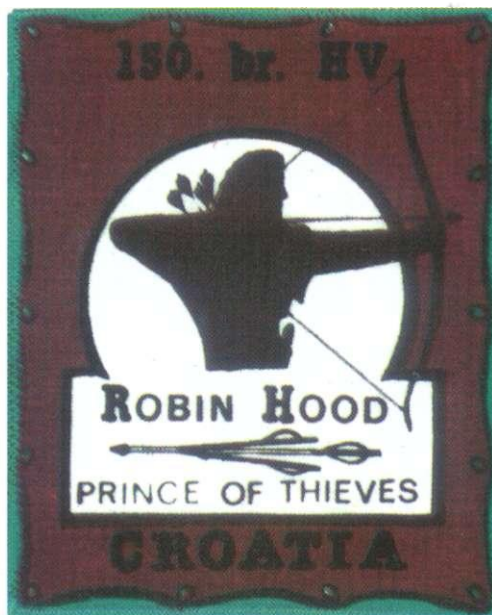


Illustration 18: The unit from Zagreb (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 192)



Illustration 19: The unit from Osijek (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje II*, 291)



Illustration 20: The unit from Duga Resa (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 340)



Illustration 21: The unit from Sinj (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje II*, 643)



Illustration 22: The unit from Kerestinec (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 37)



Illustration 23: The unit from Sisak (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 106)



Illustration 24: The unit from Pazin (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 476)



Illustration 25: The unit from Šibenik (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje II*, 609)



Illustration 26: The unit from Zagreb (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje II*, 93)



Illustration 27: The unit from Rijeka (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje II*, 534)



Illustration 28: The unit from Pula (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje II*, 558)



Illustration 29: The unit from Rijeka (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 447)



Illustration 30: The unit from Zagreb (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 147)



Illustration 31: The unit from Nova Gradiška (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 163)



Illustration 32: The unit from Rijeka (*Hrvatsko ratno znakovlje I*, 383)